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**PARENTAL VERBAL MEDIATION FOR
CHILDREN'S INTERNET USE**

A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

Bellarmino University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

Communication

by

Daeun (Grace) Lee

Fall 2018

PARENTAL VERBAL MEDIATION FOR CHILDREN'S INTERNET USE

BELLARMINE UNIVERSITY

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Parental Verbal Mediation for Children's Internet Use

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Pastor Soon Bok and Mrs. Bong Sook Lee, who have been unbelievably encouraging, supportive, and inspirational while I faced challenges, learned lessons, and encountered victories throughout this entire process. You are my encouragement, my role model, and my motivation. I love you.

When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer.

-- Corrie ten Boom

ABSTRACT

Parental Verbal Mediation for Children's Internet Use

by

Daeun Grace Lee

Master of Arts in Communication

Bellarmino University, 2018

This study explores the different communication strategies parents employ when speaking to their children about their Internet use. The Internet is continuously and rapidly expanding in terms of content range and mobility, and is becoming more and more an integrated and essential part of children across the nation. Thus, parents must be willing and equipped to educate their children about their habits of Internet use through effective mediation strategies. The goal of this study is to understand not only how parents speak to their children about their Internet use, but also how parents currently perceive the significance of these conversations. In addition, the study aims to discover whether there are any associations between parents' demographic information and the type of mediation strategy they prefer. The objective of the study is to help parents learn to communicate more effectively with their children about healthy Internet practices.

Two divergent mediation strategies are discussed. Active parental mediation emphasizes parents engaging in active discussion with their children, as well as providing a warm, encouraging tone when speaking about Internet use. Restrictive parental mediation refers to primarily relying on household rules to protect their children from the negative influences of the Internet, as well as technological software that helps to protect them from inappropriate content. These communicative strategies not only help their children navigate the countless opportunities provided by the Internet, but also arm them to protect themselves against the dangers of the Internet that threatens their healthy cognitive, social, and emotional development. Research has found that the verbal component of communication has a greater impact than the behavioral component of parental influence. Therefore, the study also emphasizes the verbal component of parents' mediation strategies, including the frequency, conversation and conformity communication styles, and openness and honesty. 161 parents from a whole family unit (i.e., composed of the biological children of heterosexual spouses) are recruited to participate in an online survey.

Results indicate that parents are currently employing a heavily integrated methodology of both strategies. Parents report to possess a high perception of importance in verbally communicating to their children about their Internet use. Multiple hierarchical regression analyses indicate that male parents are more prone to employ restrictive parental mediation than female parents, and that higher education has a positive effect in the employment of both active parental mediation and restrictive parental mediation. Implications and suggestions for future research are discussed from results.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Do you remember the last time when a memorable conversation that you had with your parent(s) popped up in your mind right before making an important decision? I conjecture that whether it was subconsciously or consciously, you have heeded their counsel and weighed your decisions based on your parent's advice. Whether it involves selecting a significant other, deciding whether to start smoking, becoming sexually active, or developing life-long personal and professional relationships, your parents' words have had a significant impact on the way you think, the worldview you embrace, or the religion that dictates your lifestyle.

Research has long established that communication between a parent and a child is critical in influencing the development of the child's foundational beliefs and future behavior (Gelman, Taylor, Nguyen, Leaper, & Bigler, 2004). Parents must understand that the words they speak to their children indeed matter – whether they are spouted out in the heat of the moment or thought through with care and deliberation. Thus, communicating with their children purposefully and strategically can determine their children's future trajectory in many ways.

The focal issue of this study lies in the notion that parents must be intentional and strategic in their communication with their children regarding their online activities. The Internet today has become increasingly prevalent and therefore unavoidable in the lives of children all around the globe. However, the online world encompasses many hazardous territories and presents various safety issues for children, who are more impressionable to

these dangers than adults. Additionally, children have a more difficult time than adults in piloting the Internet in a way that maximizes its vast opportunities, while simultaneously minimizing its many risks.

This study was derived from a spontaneous conversation sparked between a group of friends on a casual Sunday night. There was a discussion regarding different propensities on the Internet that were deleterious to the moral, psychological, and emotional growth of children, which subsequently led to parental influence regarding these habits. One particular friend mentioned that his online activities were never a topic of discussion with his parents, and that in some cases, he had even deliberately hidden his habits from them because of a growing fear of their castigation and consequent restriction of Internet activities. He lamented that his family environment regarding the topic of the Internet was less than open and honest, and wished that he was afforded more support and freedom to ask questions and glean wisdom from his parents when he was a child. Parents of millennials have been inadvertently placed on the other side of an accelerated digital divide, and often appear more intimidated than apathetic to discuss with their children about their online activities. However, the conclusion led to the speculation that as the digital climate has so rapidly changed in the past two decades, family communication surrounding the Internet will have also transitioned along with the change. This made me curious: how do parents in this generation consider the topic matter of Internet use with their children? How has this issue of parental education regarding the Internet been approached in academic research?

Due to the recent spike in Internet use in children, the responsibility of parents to monitor and guide children in their activities online have become ever more salient. This may be a particularly daunting prospect for parents, as the Internet not only has a wider content

range to monitor than other forms of media, but also is becoming increasingly mobile (Padilla-Walker & Coyne, 2011).

However, when parents neglect their responsibility to actively intercede in their children's online activities through their words or family regulations, children will take it upon themselves to self-regulate – often in an ill-equipped way, with little to no discipline. One study demonstrated this by correlating the Internet access of families' homes with children's increased time online (Eastin, Greenberg, & Hofschire, 2006). Higher levels of Internet access with fewer restrictions and technological filtering software was seen to increase the time that children spent online. Conversely, positive parent-child attachment and interactions are found to reduce the risks and significantly influence children's Internet use (Liu, Fang, Zhou, Zhang, & Deng, 2013; Yusuf, Osman, Hassan, & Teimoury, 2014). These studies – and many more – have emphasized the significance of parental influence in children's online activities. Left to their own devices (pun unintended), children are now only too apt to wander into dangerous places on the Internet and be misled into developing various habits and addictions that will be detrimental to their adulthood.

Parental mediation research has undergone many adaptations and expansions in line with the changing climate of new media – specifically from the use of television to the use of the Internet (Clark, 2011). Studies have shown that the most effective way to educate children on the issue of Internet use is through a mixture of parental mediation strategies that are more heavily weighted by warmth, trust, and support, rather than primarily relying on enforcing rules and regulations (Eastin et al., 2006; Lee & Chae, 2012; Nathanson, 2002; Padilla-Walker, Coyne, Fraser, Dyer, & Yorgason, 2012). As such, the first goal of this

research is to examine which parental mediation strategy has been currently most heavily used among parents.

In addition, the types of verbal communication exchanged between parents and their children within the mediation process is another centerpiece of this study. Although the extant literature on parental mediation has addressed the importance of parental involvement in children's online activities, there has been less focus on the verbal aspect of parental mediation. Verbal communication is considered the primary influence of the socialization of a child (Starrels & Holm, 2000). The spoken word is immensely powerful when used with intentionality. This study addresses this gap in putting the focus on the verbal aspect of parent-child communication regarding the Internet.

Adapted from previous mediation research, an online survey has been conducted among parents of a whole family unit (i.e., composed of the biological children of spouses in their first marriage) with children from ages 1-18. Through this study, I intend to 1) raise awareness in parents about the importance of conversing with their children about safe Internet practices, and 2) to guide communication researchers, counseling professionals, campaign designers, and education consultants in helping parents to develop strategies for communicating significant and emotionally charged topic matters with their children.

In the next sections, the extant literature about the prevalence of Internet use and what this surge in Internet use signifies for the development of children is reviewed. Then, the different parental mediation strategies and the verbal aspect of parental communication are discussed; next, the research design of the survey and the results generated are presented; and finally, implications for practice and directions for future research are discussed.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTERNET USE AND CHILDREN

The term “children” may seem ambiguous. For purposes of this study, the term will be used to refer to anyone under the guidance and cultivation of their parents; thus, anyone under the age of 18. Studies show that increasingly younger children are accessing the Internet. For example, one study involving the mediation practices of parents, studied parents of younger children between the ages of 2-12 (Nikken & Jansz, 2014a). They determined that younger children must be a part of the study, as they are increasingly engaged in online activities. Other scholars have reported that children as young as three or four are frequently online as well, even though they possess limited ability to use the Internet (Hasebrink, Livingstone, Haddon, & Kjartan, 2009). Additionally, an average of 60% of all European children aged 6-10 were online, according to a study done in 2008 (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009), and 75% of all European children according to a study done in 2009 (Hasebrink et al., 2009). These studies denote a need for very young children to be included in the research.

However, young children are not the only ones who are in need of parental guidance. Adolescents are more digitally literate and are heavy users of newer electronic communication forms (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). They are more capable of engaging in rational conversations with their parents that involve habit formations and regulations regarding Internet usage. Researchers have targeted pre-teens and teens in national studies involving their behaviors and attitude toward online activities (Turow & Nir, 2000). Although the term “children” may not commonly refer to older teenagers, they are,

after all, still the children of their parents. Hence, unless the age group is otherwise specified with terms such as “teenager,” “adolescent,” or “younger children,” I will use the term “children” in a broader sense as those who are under the guidance of their parents.

The realm of research regarding communicative exchanges between parents and children include the practices of sexual activity (Flores & Barroso, 2017; Pariera, 2016), the ideals of marriage (Jackl, 2016), family formation (Starrels & Holm, 2000), and alcohol and tobacco usage (Ennett, Bauman, Foshee, Pemberton, & Hicks, 2001; Miller-Day & Kam, 2010). This extensive scope of research also involves adult participants who recall conversations with parents in retrospect. This indicates that individuals are influenced by their parents when developing behaviors and habits that last well into adulthood. In short, the trajectory of future behavior is set, in a broader sense, in childhood.

Internet use is becoming a progressively ubiquitous behavior in children. It has become prevalent in all aspects of their lives, whether it be personal, social, or academic. The World Internet Project has reported that of the entire population in the U.S., 86% of children go online in schools (USC Annenberg School Center for the Digital Future, 2017). In addition, research has found that 73% of American teenagers are now frequently visiting social networking sites (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010) to engage in virtual social life. Moreover, due to the various devices that are able to connect online, children now are provided multiple platforms through which they can use the Internet (Nikken & Jansz, 2014a). Children can now view TV shows and participate in interactive and educational programs online through the screens of television, the iPad, and the smartphone. Many households have Siri and Alexa (digital voice assistants in technological devices), who

respond to their questions and commands whenever they please. In addition, virtual gaming has become a major source of entertainment for many families (Clark, 2011).

THE IMPACT AND INFLUENCE OF INTERNET USE IN CHILDREN

It is important to note that Internet use is accompanied by equally negative and positive influences that affect the developmental processes of children. On the one hand, the negative outcomes of the Internet integrated into their lives have been prolifically documented. Scholars have struggled with mediating the effects of increased aggression in children who are frequently exposed to violence online (Clark, 2011; Greenfield, 2004; Law, Shapka, & Olson, 2010). Internet and mobile addiction has become a forefront issue (Nalwa & Anand, 2003; Weinstein & Lejoyeux, 2010). Children who use the Internet at home struggle with protecting their private information (Livingstone, 2008). At worst, researchers discuss the most frightening prospect of children becoming unknowing victims of child sexual exploitation (Dombrowski, LeMasney, Ahia, & Dickson, 2004).

In one study, Greenfield (2004) utilized publicly available websites targeted for children and adolescents to investigate how they were being socialized online. Websites such as Disney were reported to target children as a major market, thus promote materialism through the many products advertised specifically to children (Greenfield, 2004). Children have more difficulty differentiating between advertisement from other content, and it is easier to actively promote products to them without their awareness. All they must do is ask their parents to purchase the item for them, and they have become an unknowing consumer. Additionally, Greenfield (2004) found that the negative developmental effects of the Internet can extend to a child or adolescent's adoption of sexual promiscuity, racism and prejudice, and aggression. This was not only due to the content produced by website administration, but

also through the participation of the members on the website. The communication of children to each other on the various websites, which provided a platform for their self-expression, have often produced a culture of inappropriate language and offensive material (Greenfield, 2004).

Greenfield's study (2004) demonstrates that children are not only susceptible to be influenced and educated by their authority figures, but also to the environments online that parents may not be aware they are exposed to. With the magnitude of children's participation online, the cultures and people they virtually encounter will significantly impact their behavioral habits and overall character development, regardless of what culture is cultivated in their own homes. This means that it is not safe for parents to assume that surrounding a child with a positive education in the physical world will safeguard them from experiencing negative socialization in the virtual world. Encountering a culture online that promotes disinhibition in sexuality, racism, and violence in childhood will likely have a destructive effect in the development of healthy ethical values in adulthood.

On the other hand, the digital age has presented countless opportunities for children. The Internet has provided many prospects in education and socialization. An unhealthy fear of the risks that children and youth face online may lead to the excessive discouragement of much or all of their online activities, which may inhibit them from encountering these prospects.

A wealth of unprecedented information now lies at the fingertips of children. Those who are hungry learners now have boundless access to information that they would not have had even decades ago. Consequently, many schools now recognize the growing importance of children developing Internet literacy, and include classes that teach them Internet skills for

their education and future employment (Livingstone & Bober, 2004). Additionally, Livingstone and Bober (2004) also report that the Internet is rapidly becoming supplemental as an information medium to support school work, and is central to our visions of a good school, an active community, and a comfortable home. Hasebrink et al. (2009) report that both children and adult agree that children often utilize the Internet for accessing educational resources and searching for global information, in addition to social networking and entertainment. With the vast array of information and communication platforms at their very fingertips, children now have access to opportunities they would not have imagined in the previous decades. One scholar eloquently sums it up when he argues that the wealth of benefits and opportunities of children's wholesome online activities may include:

increasing social capital and social support, gaining the opportunity for self-disclosure and exploration of deviant identities and personal problems, building self-esteem, access to otherwise unavailable relationships including intimacies and romances alongside the general development of further strong and weak social ties with all the benefits they bring... The available social resources, educational possibilities and life experiences could have positive effects in shaping their present and future lives. (Holmes, 2009)

These reports and studies warrant parents to acknowledge that their young children will be connected to a limitless and unruly virtual world, with little to no predictability with what they will see and whom they will encounter online. Children, who are more impressionable during their formative years, are more susceptible to the dangers and risks of the Internet than ever. The question, then, becomes not *if* parental mediation is necessary, but more *how* parental mediation must be executed in order to produce the effective balance

between maximizing the opportunities and minimizing the risks that children face on the Internet. The role they must play as educators, supporters, and nurturers is indeed intimidating, as it may be a catalyst to their children's success or downfall. However, with the proper mediation strategies at hand, parents will be adequately equipped to undertake the task of educating their children in developing habits that minimize the risks and capitalize on the limitless opportunities that the Internet provides.

PARENTAL MEDIATION TYPOLOGIES

Before the spike in Internet use in children, parental mediation literature and research included studies that were geared toward children's use of television (Mendoza, 2009). However, the switch from old-media to new-media has occurred within an astoundingly short amount of time – merely decades, since the 1980's (Mendoza, 2009). Currently, much of the discourse regarding parental mediation includes children's Internet usage. Parental Mediation Theory, which was developed for children's television consumption, is now being rendered as insufficient by scholars and researchers in the field, and called to be expanded to online activities (Clark, 2011). Because of its multi-faceted purposes, the online world has now become a venue for the socialization, identity-formation, and self-actualization processes of innumerable children (Livingstone, 2008), and as a result, this issue has become even more outstanding and in need of attention.

Parental mediation strategies have been proved effective in influencing the Internet use of children. A study focusing on the moderating effects of parents' mediation strategy to online risks reported that although children's online activity was positively associated with online risks, parental mediation moderated the degree of association (Lee & Chae, 2012). In

other words, with certain mediation strategies employed by parents, the online risks that children were exposed to were reduced.

Yet what, specifically, are these mediation strategies? Broadly speaking, the extant literature on parental mediation strategy distinguishes between two divergent typologies: *active parental mediation* and *restrictive parental mediation* (Jiow, Lim, & Lin, 2017; Lee & Chae, 2007; Nikken & Jansz, 2014a; Padilla-Walker & Coyne, 2011). In addition to these two, researchers have created other categories of mediation strategies, especially when considering overall parenting styles concerning media monitoring. These categories include authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, neglectful, and co-use (Eastin et al., 2006; Jiow et al., 2017; Nikken & Jansz, 2014a). Other mediation strategies involve descriptive actions, such as controlling the location of technological devices (i.e., the living room or the bedroom) and installing technology software that filters the content accessible on the devices (Eastin et al., 2006). However, the following sections will further discuss the two primary *communicative* strategies of active parental mediation and restrictive parental mediation.

Family Communication Patterns Theory

Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCPT) is the theoretical framework used to guide the development of the current study. FCPT was developed by McLeod and Chaffee in 1972, and explores the patterns of communications that families use to communicate with each other in familiar and stable ways. One noteworthy contribution of the current study lies in the weaving of this theory into the two different typologies of parental mediation. When examining the components of this theory, one can see that it is equipped to support the concept of both APM and RPM, and provide an explanation as to how they work, how they are conceptualized, and what this means for the family.

This theory not only examines the patterns of communication of a family, as the name describes, but also explores how families tend to create and share the same social reality (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). This occurs in the form of coorientation, a concept that refers to two or more people evaluating and analyzing the same object to orient them into their own social cognition (Braithwaite, 2005). In coorientation, each person involved possesses two different perceptions: the person's own evaluation of an object (or the contents of the web, in our context), and the person's perception of the other person's evaluation of the same object. Together, these two perceptions determine the three attributes of coorientation: agreement, accuracy, and congruence.

When an agreement is achieved in coorientation, a family is then able to create and share the same social reality, and communication between the family unit becomes free-flowing and smooth. This can be done through two ways: socio-orientation – which involves a family member conforming to and adopting the evaluation of the other family member – and concept-orientation – during which the family members proactively engage in discussion in order to come to an agreement in the evaluation of the object.

This creation of shared reality is achieved through the two primary concepts described in FCPT: conversation orientation and conformity orientation (Krcmar, Ewoldsen, & Koerner, 2016). Conversation orientation occurs when there is open and frequent communication between parents and children, and results in the creation of social reality in collaboration with one another. In contrast, conformity orientation refers to a more restricted communication between the family members, and the dominant member would demand others to conform to his/her own social reality. In the next section, these two types of orientation will be interlinked with the two types of parental mediation strategies.

Active Parental Mediation. Active parental mediation, hereafter referred to as APM, is conceptualized as warm and supportive, as well as being more intentional in communication that guides and nurtures self-regulation (Álvarez, Torres, Rodríguez, Padilla, & Rodrigo, 2013; Valcke, Bonte, De Wever, & Rots, 2010). This particular mediation strategy involves parents proactively discussing the content of the media with the child, as well as the messages inherently embedded in the content. APM not only includes protecting one's children from negative media effects, but also increasing the exposure to the opportunities and positive effects stemming from proper Internet use.

The tone of parents employing the APM strategy may be either positive, negative, or neutral (Jiow et al., 2017). Parents may use a positive tone when praising certain content or advertisements online, as well as encouraging and reinforcing positive Internet habits in their children. They may use a negative tone when discussing inappropriate content and advertisements on the Internet, such as ones that encourage materialism, violence, or addiction. Finally, parents may use a neutral tone when the discussion cannot be classified as either negative or positive. A neutral tone would be useful for parents to not only gauge the mental and emotional state of their children, but also actively engage the child in discussions that equip them to make wise judgments on their own in the future. In using these various types of communication, parents are able to not only minimize the dangerous territories of the Internet, but also encourage their children to take advantage of the benefits and opportunities provided by the Internet. APM can be considered a more collaborative strategy, where parents not only impart wisdom and guidance to their children, but also provide for them a safe space to voice their own opinions and develop their own value systems collectively.

In APM, parents may prioritize discussion about the worldview promoted by a TV show, and ask insightful questions appropriate to the child's cognitive capabilities to determine his/her value extraction of a film. This strategy nurtures critical thinking in the children, enabling them to take inventory of their own beliefs as they develop in their formative years. In one study (Jiow et al., 2017), the mediation strategies of parents were categorized into discursive, diversionary, and investigative activities, particularly regarding their children's video game play. Discursive conversations were used to inform the rules and regulations imposed on the child, which inculcated discernment and wisdom in the child discerning for him/herself what types of content would be appropriate. Investigative activities involved parents asking questions and discovering more about the video game, which helped them to determine if the game was suitable for their children. Diversionary activities involved introducing children to alternative activities when the video game in question was determined as inappropriate. All of these activities enabled parents and children to delve into deeper and more meaningful discussions that constructed shared values and perspectives regarding online video games.

Parents employing APM also participate with children in educational and participatory activities online. In one study, parents suggesting useful websites and visiting certain websites with their children were positively associated with the child's frequency of educational online activities (Lee & Chae, 2007). Although participatory learning appears to be more action-based rather than verbal in nature, the ideology behind the activity promotes active discussion with the children in order to interpret the materials on the Internet together. In doing this, parents are able to understand how their children are processing and

internalizing their experiences on the Internet, and to intervene where there is error or waywardness in the internalization process.

Additionally, APM also includes the concept of “prearming” the children for future Internet use, so that they would be able to protect themselves from being exposed to unwanted content or becoming addicted to Internet use (Padilla-Walker & Coyne, 2011). Although prearming takes higher parental effort, it is one of the most successful media monitoring strategies during adolescence (Nathanson, 2002). Lee and Chae (2012) also argued that parental mediation strategies must extend beyond mere restriction to cultivating self-regulation and discernable participation through extensive dialogue. APM strategies include discussing, interpreting, evaluating, and commenting on materials on the Internet, so that children can further understand the underlying messages the program/software is conveying.

In the context of FCPT, APM can be considered in alignment with conversation orientation. In the context of parental mediation strategies, conversation orientation would describe a warm and supportive environment of honest discussions that occur repeatedly and freely, in which all members of the family (in this case, especially children) are encouraged to participate and voice their opinions into sharing a co-created social reality regarding the value of the Internet within the family. This will result in a shared perception of how the Internet should be used in a healthy way, with the children developing a healthier perception of reality. In one study (Schrodt, Ledbetter, & Ohrt, 2007), conversation orientation was found to be a significant mediator between children’s mental health and well-being. Researchers reported that family conversation orientation was positively associated with a child’s self-esteem, as well as inversely associated with perceived stress and mental health

symptoms. Such an open communication pattern within the family creates a shared social reality, where there is mutual understanding with one another. In particular, conversation orientation is synonymous to APM with the emphasis on a free-flowing discussion occurring consistently between the parent and the child. The child would feel free to discuss the values and concepts embedded within content found online. Without parents suppressing or conveying rigid negative or positive values during discussions, the flow of curiosity in the child can be unhindered, resulting in the development of creativity and self-regulation. Moreover, when the children feel free to openly question the reasons behind certain Internet rules enforced by the parents, the parents and the child would be able to reasonably negotiate and develop regulations that feel comfortable to both sides, and intimacy and openness is cultivated in the relationship.

Restrictive Parental Mediation. Restrictive parental mediation, hereafter referred to as RPM, positions restrictions and rule-setting as its primary methodology. RPM stands in clear contrast to APM in that rather than preferring to engage in conversation with the children, parents tend to rely on either enforcing rules that restrict the children's access to media, or denying them access completely when the media is considered unsuitable for them. Parents who employ RPM also frequently utilize technological blocking (Eastin et al., 2006), which would allow them to monitor their children's Internet activities and inhibit children's access to certain websites.

Padilla-Walker and Coyne (2011) described APM as "prearming," while describing RPM as "cocooning." This description suggests that while APM is effective in teaching children self-regulation, RPM is more of a temporary method used to protect children from inappropriate content. Cocooning was used synonymously with RPM to indicate the

occurrence of either restricting access or demanding the child to turn off the content of the media when it was deemed inappropriate.

Developing guidelines and rules about where and when the Internet can be used is undoubtedly an essential part of parental mediation. However, disproportionately employing this strategy as the primary or the sole strategy may hinder the child's development of self-regulation. Children may also be less prone to obeying the regulations set by their parents, when asked to follow them without active discussion of the reasons why. In a study that surveyed parents and adolescents regarding television content, researchers reported that RPM was correlated with less positive attitudes toward parents and more positive attitudes in adolescents of the content prohibited by the parents, as well as more viewing of the content with friends (Nathanson, 2002). Nathanson (2002) suggests that parental attempts to control or restrict the freedom of their children may backfire – especially when they value obedience while disregarding their children's input. In another study, technological blocking was found to be particularly high in parents who were classified as “neglectful” and “authoritarian” (Eastin et al., 2006). This study suggests that when parents neglect to actively engage the children in meaningful discussions about their Internet behaviors, yet expect unquestioned obedience, they may depend heavily upon technological filtering and monitoring software as the quickest and most efficient way to protect their children from harmful content.

Lee and Chae (2012) warn that while employing RPM may effectively reduce online risks, these risks may be reduced at the expense of opportunities that children could experience online. Additionally, parents may argue that employing RPM and restricting their children's time may have a positive effect on family time together, or family communication. However, researchers found that the types of children's online activities determined its

influence on family time and family communication (Lee & Chae, 2007). This finding indicates that simply restricting children's time and web site access online (a distinct feature of RPM) does not automatically increase family relationships – or directly benefit the children, for that matter.

When examining RPM through the eyes of FCPT, one can see that its components and conceptualization is likened to conformity orientation, where the family operates on a structure that is strictly hierarchical. The interests of the dominant members of the family (a.k.a., the parents) or the entire family unit is emphasized over the interest of individual family members, such as the child. As a result, the child does not feel free to inquire about the rules set by parents regarding the Internet, and is expected to conform to them and deliver absolute, unquestioned obedience. Individual growth and development is not prioritized in conformity orientation in the same way it is in families with conversation orientation.

Perhaps one of the most noteworthy element that links RPM to conformity orientation lies in the word “conformity.” Family members are encouraged to conform to one particular set of beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors. Individuality and discussions pertaining to individual beliefs are not encouraged, as conflict is avoided at all costs to foster family harmony. As parents are usually the dominant members of the family, the guidelines that they set for the Internet and the beliefs that they embrace – for example, that the Internet is a fearful and dangerous place for children and uses for it must be minimized – are expected to be embraced by the children as well. In conformity orientation, intimacy and openness tend to be neglected; this also translates into RPM.

The Continuum of APM and RPM.

In this study, the mediation strategies of APM and RPM are placed on opposite ends of one continuum, rather than divided into two dichotomized forms of communication. This is because parents are seen to employ both methods of APM and RPM when mediating their children's Internet use; they are hardly ever seen to employ only one strategy (Eastin et al., 2006). The ratio of the mixture of each method may be different according to the parenting style, the age of the child, or the parent's attitude toward the Internet in general. Parents of one particular family may mostly employ RPM and operate on regulations enforced regarding the Internet, while the parents of another family may be more interested in frequent and open communication with the child and mostly employ APM. In light of this discussion, the first research question is as follows:

RQ1: Which communication strategy do parents more heavily use with their children about their Internet use?

It is noteworthy to consider that while parents may employ RPM strategies to protect their children from inappropriate or harmful content on the Internet, utilizing RPM in a healthy way may lead to the addition of APM strategies. This is because enforcing rules regarding the Internet may often lead to the discussion of these rules. RPM is conceptualized as parents primarily relying on rules and technological software to protect their children from the dangers of the Internet, with little to no discussion involved. While this is true, when there is extensive dialogue involved, the strategy can easily transition into APM. When parents verbally communicate to their children about *why* they enforce certain rules regarding the Internet, they open a gateway to opportunities in which children may freely ask questions about the value of these rules. Consequently, because engaging in conversations to enhance the understanding of the children about healthy Internet practices is considered an APM

strategy, these two strategies – while appearing to lie in opposition to each other – may also go hand in hand.

THE ROLE OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN APM AND RPM

This study focuses exclusively on the verbal communication between parents and children. Verbal communication is conceptualized in this paper as the body of verbal messages sent and received between parents and their children. This is not in the least to suggest that nonverbal communication is inconsequential or even irrelevant. In fact, scholars argue that nonverbal processes are an essential part of parent-child communication (Colegrove & Havighurst, 2017). Nonverbal processes include body language (such as the direction of the body or facial expressions when communicating with the child) and actions, such as quality time spent together or physical affection. The modeling aspects of parent-child communication have a great impact on children; they learn by imitating their parents and in turn internalize their values and worldviews. Robert Sears' work on parental impact in his social learning theory (Grusec, 1992) emphasizes the role of the parent's behavior in children's internalization of their values, attitudes, and conduct.

However, verbal communication is found to be the primary influence of socialization of a child (Starrels & Holm, 2000). In other words, *defining* influence is stronger than *modeling* influence in the terrain of parent-child communication. Studies have found that deliberately and consistently sending messages to children works to impress upon their foundational beliefs in adulthood, and influences their habits and behaviors as they mature (Gelman et al., 2004). This establishes the importance of the verbal aspect of communication over the behavioral. Starrels and Holm (2000) suggests that this may be attributable to the fact that verbal communication may be a more direct and clear form of communication from

the parents of their expectations and desires for their children than behavior is. For this reason, the primary component of this study will be the verbal component of parent-child communication.

As stated previously, much research has been scrupulously conducted in parent-child conversations regarding significant and sensitive issues, such as sex, tobacco use, and family formation. The body of research regarding parent-child communication demonstrate the fact that parents anticipate these foundational conversations and regard them to be crucial in cultivating the fundamentals of understanding upon which their children can build on as they mature through life and make important decisions (Flores & Barroso, 2017; Jackl, 2016). Research also supports the significance of these parent-child conversations, and how these conversations are associated with the children enacting the advice they were given by their parents (Aspy et al., 2007; Flores & Barroso, 2017; Sneed, 2008). However, there is little to no literature that emphasizes this aspect of parent-child communication on how children use the Internet. For a number of these subject matters, the advice that children receive from their parents have become a social norm; for example, parent-child communication regarding sexual activity has been colloquially termed “the sex talk.” Given that parents understand the importance of engaging in conversation with their children about the important aspects of life, coupled with the fact that the Internet is now integrated into most aspects of children’s daily lives, it is important to discover whether parents consider their conversations with their children about the Internet to be a crucial factor in cultivating the social and cognitive development of their children.

The Construct of Verbal Communication

There are three dimensions relevant to the study when conceptualizing the term verbal communication: frequency, conversation or conformity style communication, and openness and honesty. Frequency refers to the continuous conversations that parents engage in with their children regarding their Internet use. In a seminal study conducted on message repetition (Cacioppo & Petty, 1979), it was suggested that the recurrence of the message arguments afforded more opportunities to cognitively elaborate upon them and to realize their persuasiveness and favorable implications. When discussing parent-child communication, this is also true of sensitive subject matters, such as conversations about sexual activity. Past research has found that while on occasion parents may view these conversations as one particular discussion that takes place as a milestone once the child is of age, it is much more beneficial to have repeated conversations about sex with the children (Martino, Elliott, Corona, Kanouse, & Schuster, 2008). Another study that highlights the role of frequent communication was conducted on the self-esteem of children (Kernis, Brown, & Brody, 2000). Children with more unstable self-esteem than others reported that their fathers spoke less frequently of their good behavior. Additionally, children with lower and more unstable self-esteem perceived that their parents more frequently criticized them and called them derogatory names. Researchers hence suggested that the frequency of verbal communication has a significant impact on the children's internalization of their own value and worth. These studies support the argument that frequency is a significant factor in parent-child communication.

Conversation and conformity style communication is the second dimension in our construct of verbal communication. Initially termed one-way and two-way communication, conversation and conformity style communication was derived from the theory of FCPT

(Krcmar et al., 2016). As stated in previous sections, the conceptualization of APM and RPM have been guided by FCPT and interlinked with the theory's constructs of conversation orientation and conformity orientation. Conversation style communication refers to when parents are specifically engaging in conversation that involves investigating the child's Internet practices, such as asking questions about their online activities or asking them to voice their opinions about household rules regarding the Internet. Conformity style communication refers to when parents are verbally enforcing and reinforcing established household rules, as well as communicating their own (the parents') expectations and desires for the child in terms of their Internet practices. Conformity style communication is true to its name in that parents expect their children to conform to their own standards of what healthy Internet habits look like, rather than collaborate with them in the development of its meaning.

It is important to note that while in previous sections, conversation orientation carried more positive implications than conformity orientation, these particular constructs – as an element in verbal communication – are neither positive or negative in their inferences. Whether a parent is utilizing APM or RPM more heavily than the other strategy, both conversation and conformity conversation styles may be needed – either to establish healthy boundaries in the children's Internet practices, or to engage in a deeper dialogue to collaborate in co-creating a shared social reality regarding the Internet. For example, in a study regarding parent-teen reports about the teen's sexual experience (Mollborn & Everett, 2010), researchers found that when parents communicated their expectations to their children about their (the children's) sexual activity, teens modified their sexual behaviors according to their parent's expectations. In the same way, parents may be employing a conformity communication style when they are communicating their expectations of healthy Internet

practices to their child, and this may be a factor influencing the child's future online activities.

Openness and honesty is the last component in our conceptualization of verbal communication. This refers to both the truthfulness and the accuracy of the content in the conversations taking place, as well as the perceived freedom to ask personal questions and discuss the child's online activities. In one study discussing the barriers and prompts to parent-child sexual communication (Pariera, 2016), the researcher found that a significant prompt to conversations about sex was that the child started asking the parent questions about sex. This study indicates that developing an atmosphere of freedom in the family leads the child to feel safe to ask questions, which often paves the way to meaningful discussions of sensitive topics. Additionally, a systematic review of research regarding communication between children and their parents about inherited genetic conditions demonstrated the importance of openness in parent-child communication (Metcalf, Coad, Plumridge, Gill, & Farndon, 2008). Through reviewing 17 studies conducted from 1980-2007, researchers found that openly discussing the inherited genetic condition empowered the family and enabled its members to freely deliberate difficulties and apprehensions as they arose, and that the openness further increased their support and care for each other. Conversely, they found that while the limited communication resulting from secrecy (as opposed to the openness) about the inherited genetic condition initially protected the children, the inability to openly discuss the problems that arose from the genetic condition resulted in tense relationships between family members.

In light of these three components discussed in the conceptualization of verbal communication, the second research question aims to discover whether the conversations

involving Internet use is perceived by parents as significant and crucial in the child's development.

RQ2: To what degree do parents perceive their verbal communication with their children regarding their Internet usage as important in terms of its frequency, conversation and conformity communication styles, and the openness and honesty during the process?

Parental mediation strategies that involve non-verbal communication or actions may be incorporated into either APM or RPM. For example, co-use, which involves the parent using the Internet along with the child, may be included in the category of APM. This is because co-use or co-viewing does not require that a conversation takes place between the parent and the child, but that the parent is simply there (Eastin et al., 2006). Moreover, since the ultimate ideal of co-use would be to engage in discussion with the child for the duration of the activity on the Internet, and to guide the child's assessment and internalization of the messages presented in the content, this particular category was placed into APM.

Another mediation strategy that does not initially involve verbal communication is installing technological filtering or monitoring software. However, this strategy is also incorporated into RPM, since its primary purpose is to limit or prohibit access to certain content on the Internet, and does not necessarily require extensive discussion with the child.

MEDIATION STRATEGIES AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Parents' demographic information is deemed a significant variable when predicting parent's verbal mediation strategy. Standard demographic information includes gender, age, and ethnicity. In additions to these variables, standard socioeconomic factors, which include household income, highest level of education received, and employment status, are analyzed. Various studies have found that Internet use in general increases along with higher income

and education levels (Eastin et al., 2006; Nikken & Jansz, 2014a; USC Annenberg School Center for the Digital Future, 2017; Valkenburg, Krccmar, Peeters, & Marseille, 1999).

Studies have shown that parent's socioeconomic status (SES) is a factor of influence in parental speech, parenting styles, and parental mediation (Hoff, 2003; Hoff, Laursen, & Tardif, 2002; Nikken & Jansz, 2014a). For example, Hoff (2003) found that parents with higher SES generally spoke more, longer, and with more diverse vocabulary to their children. Additionally, researchers have found that parents who have a higher income and education level employ a more clear and responsive communication style with their children, and this, in turn, results in the children becoming more educated (Sohr-Preston et al., 2013). These six variables (including SES factors, which are shown to influence their speech to their children, as well as their knowledge and frequent use of the Internet) are the focus of the third research question:

RQ3: How are the parents' demographic information associated with the forms of communication they use when discussing the issue of Internet use with their children?

The question aims to discover whether if any of these aspects of the parents are considered significant predictors of the mediation strategies they are more inclined to employ when speaking to their children about their Internet use.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

OVERVIEW

An online survey was administered to answer the three research questions presented in this study. The decision to utilize the online survey method was due to the many advantages that online surveys present (Wright, 2005). One factor of these advantages included saving time. Wright (2005) states that online surveys enable the researcher to reach a large population with common characteristics within a relatively shorter amount of time than it would if the researcher used other methods, such as going door to door. Moreover, online surveys are more cost-effective as an electronic medium, compared to paper mediums; it saves monetary and human resources required to present the questionnaires.

This study employed Qualtrics Panel, a data collection service provider that partners with over 20 online panel providers and industry partners to provide participants for a variety of research projects. Qualtrics is able to customize panel options based on the needs of the researcher, whether it is a more targeted participant panel or a broader, more nation-wide one (Long, Bendersky, & Morrill, 2011). Incoming data were strictly monitored for incompleteness rates or an inordinately short survey completion time, and manipulation checks and standard attention checks are also administered (Brandon, Long, Loraas, Mueller-Phillips, & Vansant, 2014). Because participants are incentivized with monetary resources, Qualtrics costs are relatively higher than other market research sample aggregators, such as Amazon's Mechanical Turk; however, this cost also ensures for multiple checks throughout the data collection process, which maintains their high-quality services (Brandon et al., 2014).

Qualtrics Panel has been utilized for various published studies that were both observational and experimental (Dunham, Lieberman, & Snell, 2016; Long et al., 2011; Rosoff, John, & Prager, 2012; Wright & Skagerberg, 2012).

PARTICIPANTS

Overall, 160 participants were recruited for the study. The recruitment for the research participants is done through Qualtrics's filtering system mentioned above. The sample was roughly equal parts male and female, with 51.9% female, and one individual identified as "other." The mean age of the sample was 40.21 ($SD = 10.20$), ranging from 19 to 76. The mean number of children for participants was 2.07 ($SD = 1.11$), ranging from 1 to 6, with 73.1% of the participants having two children or less. The mean age of the children of the participants was 9.94 ($SD = 5.74$), ranging from 0 (meaning that the child was less than 1 year old) to 36. The majority of the participants reported being Caucasian (75.6%), with 10.9% being Hispanic/Latinx, 7.1% Black/African, 3.8% Other, 1.3% Native American, and 1.3% Asian. Regarding employment status, 62.2% reported being employed full-time, and 7.7% employed part-time. Participants who reported being self-employed, a business owner, or a freelancer were 5.8%, with 13.5% reported not currently working and 4.5% retired. The sample contained varying amounts of annual income, with more than half of the sample (57%) reporting their household income in 2017 as \$70,000 or less, with 33.9% reporting it as \$100,000 or more. Regarding the highest level of education received, 5.8% reported acquiring a doctoral degree, 16.7% a Master's degree, 20.5% a Bachelor's degree, 9% an Associate degree, and 20.5% with some college credit, but no degree. Those with a high school diploma or the equivalent made up 16.7% of the sample.

The eligibility criterion for the study was that each participant is the parent of a whole family unit. This means that the parents were intact in the family unit, and that the child or children of this family unit were all biologically linked to both spouses, with no other children from external circumstances. This was because of the potential variables that could have arisen from different family structures, such as same-sex parents, step-parents, adopted/fostered children, and cohabiting families. The definition of the nuclear family continues to shift as societal constructs with such matters continue to change. While this may be a limitation, the scope of research was designed to be an initial study with as simple of a conceptualization of “family” as possible. The family dynamics from a more complex family structure may have resulted in spurious variables that would not be accounted for and consequently challenged the analysis and results of the study. Therefore, the sample in the current study was composed entirely of families with married spouses and their biological children.

I also ensured that parents who proceeded from the screening criteria had children between the ages of one and eighteen. Some of these parents had also raised children who were under or above these ages, but as long as they currently were raising children that fits our age criteria, they were considered eligible.

DESIGN

A computer-based survey was conducted for this project, in which data were collected online. The survey first issued a statement of informed consent (see Appendix A). After this completion, the participants who agreed to proceed were asked to complete a short survey to ensure that they were eligible for participation in the study. The filtering process involved potential participants first answering questions about their marital status. Followed by this

was a set of questions about the children in their household, in order to determine if they satisfy the screening criteria (see Appendix B). After the screening procedure, those who were eligible were directed to the questionnaire items (see Appendix C). Data were captured automatically as they answered the questions.

MEASURES

Questionnaire items were derived from existing literature, yet adapted in order to accurately answer the research questions. For example, some of these studies aimed to explore parental mediation regarding children's television use, yet were adapted appropriately in the questionnaire items to answer questions regarding Internet mediation. Furthermore, these studies did not emphasize the verbal component of parental mediation – thus these questions were adapted to do so.

The measures of the questionnaire included APM, RPM, PI (perception of importance), and standard demographics, which also included questions to ascertain socioeconomic factors (such as highest level of education received, household income, and employment status). For each of the measurement used, factor analyses were run to determine unidimensionality, in addition to reliability analysis. For the continuum of APM and RPM, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed using R, to establish unidimensionality to provide evidence that the observed scale items measured the same theoretical constructs. The following section discusses scale development and sample items.

Parental Mediation Strategies

Guided by the conceptualization of both APM and RPM, the items in this scale were adapted from previous literature (Austin, 1993; Nikken & Jansz, 2014b; Valkenburg et al., 1999).

Participants reported their answers on a five-point scale, ranging from “never” to “very often” (see Appendix C). Because the research question addresses the issue of how heavily they use the differing strategies, the items are developed on a basis of frequency rather than the parents’ perceived effectiveness of the strategy. The reliability for the scale of APM was estimated as $\alpha = .93$, and for the scale of RPM was estimated as $\alpha = .93$. Sample items pertaining to APM included “How often do you explain to your child(ren) how to handle online messages sent from an unknown source?”; “How often do you support or encourage your child(ren) about the positive things they can experience through the Internet?” Sample items pertaining to RPM included “How often do you set a specific amount of time for your child(ren) to be on any online device (phone, iPad, computer, online-connected TV)?”; “How often do you use an online device (phone, iPad, computer, online-connected TV) to keep your child(ren) occupied during a busy time of the day?”

Perceived Importance of Verbal Communication

Given there are no established scales existing, the items in this set of questionnaires were developed by the authors based on the elements of verbal communication stated in the conceptualization section. Given the nebulous construct of verbal communication, I examined participants’ perception of verbal communication in terms of frequency, conversation/conformity communication style (the name is derived from family communication patterns theory), and openness and honesty. Four items were developed on frequency, eight items on conversation/conformity communication style, and six on openness and honesty. The first item in the instrument PI was dropped due to low correlation with the other items. Afterward, the reliability for the scale was estimated as $\alpha = .93$. Sample items include “I feel strongly that frequently discussing with my child(ren) about their online

activities is important.”; “I think it is a good idea to inform my child(ren) about my ways of monitoring their activities online through verbal communication.”; “I think it is important for me to create an environment where my child(ren) can feel free to ask questions about their online activities.”

Participants reported on a five-point scale in response to statements, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Higher scores indicated a higher perception of importance of their verbal communication to their children regarding Internet usage.

Demographic Information of Participants

At the end of the survey, participants were asked about their age, gender, ethnicity, household income, highest level of education received, and employment status. Sample items include “What was your household’s total annual income in the year 2017?”; “What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, select the highest degree received.”; “Please state your place of residence below”; “Please state your current employment status below.”

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

EMPLOYMENT OF MEDIATION STRATEGIES

To answer the first research question, which asked whether APM or RPM was used more heavily with their children pertaining to their Internet use, one-sample t-tests were conducted. The mean score of APM and RPM was compared to the midpoint of the scale, 3. The mean of APM was 4.00, $SD = 0.79$, $p < .001$. The mean of RPM was 3.98, $SD = 0.86$, $p < .001$. Both the mean of APM and RPM were significantly above the midpoint of the scale, and were not statistically significant in their difference from each other. Thus, the data suggests that parents are currently employing an integrated methodology in which both mediation strategies are heavily utilized when speaking to their children about the Internet.

PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION

The second research question used the constructs of frequency, conversation/conformity style communication, and openness and honesty pertaining to verbal communication to discover parents' perceived importance of speaking to their children about the Internet. One-sample t-test was also employed for the scale of Perception of Importance. The mean of PI for frequency was 4.45, $SD = 0.61$, $p < .001$. The mean for conversation/conformity orientation style was 4.41, $SD = 0.56$, $p < .001$. Lastly, the mean for openness and honesty was 4.46, $SD = 0.53$, $p < .001$. The data from all three of these constructs presented a figure significantly above midpoint 3, which indicated that parents

indeed believe that verbal communication with their children (in terms of these three constructs) regarding the Internet is salient.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION AS PREDICTORS OF MEDIATION

A hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to examine how well the variables of gender, age, ethnicity, household income, highest level of education received, and employment status could predict the mediation strategies that parents prefer to employ. RPM and APM were both treated as outcome variables, into which the demographic variables were regressed. Two blocks of multiple regression were conducted. Gender, age, and ethnicity were entered in block 1. Regarding age, males were coded as 1, and females as 2. With these three variables controlled in the first block, household income, highest level of education received, and employment status were entered in block 2, in addition to the three variables in block 1.

For the dependent variable APM, results revealed that none of the variables in block 1 displayed statistically significant effects on the outcome variable (*adj. R*² = .05). However, in block 2 (*adj. R*² = .10), the highest level of education received was revealed as a significant predictor ($\beta = .23, t = 2.36, p = .02$). This indicated a positive effect, which signifies that participants with a higher level of education received were more inclined to employ APM with their children.

For block 1 in the dependent variable RPM (*adj. R*² = .19), results revealed that gender displayed a statistically significant effect ($\beta = -.33, t = -4.13, p < .001$). With males coded as 1, the data indicated that males displayed a negative effect, which means that they were more inclined to employ RPM than females. The variable of age also exhibited a statistically significant effect in the first block ($\beta = -.45, t = -5.61, p < .001$). This denoted a

negative effect as well, which indicates that younger ages were more inclined to employ RPM than females. In the second block ($adj. R^2 = .22$), gender, age, and education exhibited statistically significant effects, with gender ($\beta = -.22, t = -2.36, p = .2$) and age ($\beta = -.42, t = -5.24, p < .001$) displaying negative effects as they did in the first block. Education displayed a positive effect ($\beta = .19, t = 2.04, p = .04$), which indicated that participants with a higher level of education received were more inclined to employ RPM with their children.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Data analysis regarding the first research question that asked about the use of both APM and RPM as parental mediation strategies for Internet use indicates that parents are currently both strategies are heavily being used. There was not a statistically significant difference between parents' use of either strategies, which suggests that their method is healthily integrated in the way research has recommended.

An interesting finding with data analysis for the third research question, however, was that with the predictor of gender, males were more prone to employ RPM than females. This may be due to the traditional perception of the father figure being the enforcer of the rules and regulations of the family. Additionally, there was a negative correlation between the age of the participants and their frequency of RPM employment. In other words, the younger the parent, the higher the inclination of frequently using RPM to communicate with their children regarding the Internet. With the logical reasoning that in general, younger parents may raise younger children in comparison to older parents, it could be possible that RPM is more frequently employed with children at a younger age. This may be due to the fact that younger children need more guidance and regulation in developing healthy boundaries of Internet practices, as opposed to older children, who have been afforded more time to learn to self-regulate.

Studies in children and media in general must be continuously expanding, due to the rapidly shifting nature of media. Few would argue that the first step in any study that

approaches a relatively fresh topic is to analyze the level of awareness in the given society. This study has done exactly that; the task we have undertaken is to discover the current verbal mediation strategies heavily used by parents when it came to children's Internet use, along with their perception of importance. The data indicates that parents are not only aware of the importance of this topic matter, but they are also utilizing a wholesome mixture of both strategies. This indicates that the foundation for research in this area is already set – awareness and strategic mediation practices are present among parents. The future steps now are to build on this study of the current condition, targeting parental education with more focused strategies. It would behoove researchers, consultants, education specialists, and campaign designers to now focus their energy and resources to other pursuits. What types of dialogue are involved in APM? How do children's responses determine the best strategy to use? What are the different proactive measures that parents can take to enhance their communication in this topic with their children, so as to assist their development in such a salient part of their lives?

LIMITATIONS

As mentioned above, the scope of the current sample must be expanded. While researching the nuclear family with the biological children of their spouses is a good starting point, the definition for a "traditional family" is substantially shifting, and research much keep in pace with these changes.

The study also consisted of the self-reports of parents, which may lead to overestimation of their purported perception and mediation strategy employment. Additionally, due to social desirability, parents may miscalculate the content of their reports, in which they want to appear as parents who are dedicated to communicating with their

children about their Internet use. They may also simply overestimate the frequency with which they speak to their children on such matters due to limited memory.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Families with same-sex parents regarding their communication with their children about their Internet use would be a noteworthy expansion of this study. Along with same-sex parents, children who are adopted/fostered would also be the next step in this line of research. Families with both non-biological and biological children would also be a great addition. Children who are not biologically connected to their parents may have additional factors in the dynamics of their relationship that may affect their communication with one another.

Increasing the scope of research to an international context would also be helpful in determining which aspects of culture in parent-child interaction would shift depending on the conformity level of different cultures. For example, cultures who are more hierarchical may not feel the need to engage in so much conversation, and thus – with their inherent cultural values – naturally adhere to more of a conformity orientation communication style.

Regarding methodology, observing the perspectives of both parents and children would be beneficial, as this will account for the limitation of self-reporting found in this study. Asking children directly what their parents may or may not say regarding the Internet and subsequently examining the discrepancies that lie between the two will bring further clarity into the picture of the communication occurring within the family.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to discover the current situation of parents in regard to how they speak to their children about their Internet use. This involved not only understanding the appropriate parental mediation strategies used, but also to uncover their perception of the importance of such discussions. Lastly, the study analyzed parents' demographic and socioeconomic factors to see if any of these factors were significant predictors of the particular strategies they employed for parental mediation. One-sample t-tests were conducted for the first two research questions, and a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted for the third research question. Overall, the data indicates that parents are currently heavily employing both mediation strategies. Additionally, parents are already highly aware of the importance of verbal communication to their children in regard to their Internet use. Lastly, results found that the highest level of education in parents was a significant predictor in employing APM, while gender, age, and highest level of education received were all significant predictors in parents employing RPM. Going forward, researchers and scholars can build upon this study to determine where they may best invest their time, focus, and capital. Campaign designers and parental consultants can now proceed with more targeted and specified education regarding children and the Internet.

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APPENDIX A

STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

You are being invited to participate in a research project. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to tell you about the study, to let you know that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Study Title: Parents' Verbal Mediation for Children's Internet Use

Researchers: Daeun (Grace) Lee, Dr. Rain Wuyu Liu

Department and Institution: School of Communication, Bellarmine University

Address: 2001 Newburg Road
Louisville, KY 40205 USA

Contact Information: Tel: 502-272-7488
E-mail: wliu@bellarmine.edu

1. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH:

You are invited to participate in a research study about parents' verbal communication and mediation strategies regarding their children's Internet use. From this study, the researchers hope to learn how parents intentionally speak to their children about their Internet activities, how they perceive the importance of this type of communication, and how their demographic information may be linked to the specific types of mediation techniques they use. Your participation in this study will take about 10 to 15 minutes. You must be 18 years or older and a parent of a whole family unit to be eligible to participate in this study. This research project is a collaboration between the graduate student at Bellarmine and the advising professor.

2. WHAT YOU WILL DO:

You will be given survey questions to answer. You will be asked to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the questions.

3. POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

You will not immediately benefit from taking part in this study, but your responses will help us understand the alignment or distortion in the communication of your organization. At your request, we can also bring you the project results once data collection and analysis is complete.

4. POTENTIAL RISKS:

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

5. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY:

The data for this project will be kept confidential and the data we collect will not be associated with your name in any way. Any information that could potentially identify you will be removed from the survey, and any information published will refer to only aggregated information or be presented in a

way that preserves your anonymity. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. Information about you will be kept confidential to the maximum extent allowable. Data will be stored on a password-protected computer, or in a locked file cabinet, under control of the study researchers. This information will be kept for at least three years.

6. YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW:

Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw your consent, refuse to answer any of the questions asked, or discontinue participation at any point in time. You will also be informed of any findings that develop during the course of the study that may influence your willingness to continue your participation.

7. COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY:

You will receive points from participating this study and then redeem collected points for prizes or products.

8. CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Institutional Review Board (IRB) office at 502-272-8032. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject, in confidence, with a member of the committee. This is an independent committee composed of members of the University community and lay members of the community not connected with this institution.

You acknowledge that all your present questions have been answered in language you can understand. If you have any questions about the study, please contact. For any questions about this research, you may contact the principle investigator, Dr. Wuyu Liu on this research project at 502-272-7488 or wliu@bellarmine.edu.

9. CONSENT

By going forward, you indicate your voluntary agreement to participate in this study and have your answers included in the data set.

APPENDIX B
SCREENING CRITERIA

SCREENING CRITERIA

Following are questions that we would like for you to answer about yourself. Please read each item carefully and answer them as accurately as you can.

1. In which country do you currently reside?
 - a. _____ → any country other than U.S.A → survey terminated
2. Please select your marital status below.
 - a. Single → survey terminated
 - b. Married → proceed to Q2
 - c. Cohabiting → survey terminated
 - d. Separated → survey terminated
 - e. Divorced → survey terminated
 - f. Widowed → survey terminated
3. Do you have a/any child(ren) who is/are currently living with you?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No → survey terminated
4. Please select if the child(ren) in your household is/are (Choose as many as it applies to your situation):
 - a. Born from me and my current spouse (i.e. my current spouse and I are the biological parents)
 - b. Adopted → survey terminated
 - c. Fostered → survey terminated
 - d. From a previous marriage on either side → survey terminated
 - e. Temporarily under our care → survey terminated

5. What is the age(s) of your child(ren)? (Choose as many as it applies to your situation if you have more than one child)

- a. Younger than 1 year old
- b. 1-12
- c. 13-18
- d. Older than 18

(Participants who did not check b. or c. → survey terminated)

6. How many children are currently living with you in your household?

- a. 1
- b. 2
- c. 3
- d. 4
- e. 5
- f. 6
- g. 7
- h. 8
- i. 9
- j. 10 or more

7. How old is/are your children?

_____ (whole number)

(Q#7 linked to Q#6: 1 box for Q#7 if Q#6 answer is only 1 child, 2 boxes for Q#7 if Q#6 answer is 2 children, etc.)

APPENDIX C
QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

Both APM and RPM are measured on a 5-point scale from “Never” to “Very Often”

***Active Parental Mediation (APM)* (Adapted from Austin, 1993; Nikken & Jansz, 2014; Valkenburg, 2009)**

Following are statements that pertain to you. We would like to know the frequency with which you engage in any of these activities. There are no correct or incorrect answers to these questions.

1. How often do you explain the motives of characters in a show that your child(ren) watch(es) on the Internet?
2. How often do you ask questions to your child(ren) about what they think some things on a show on the Internet really means?
3. How often do you discuss with your child(ren) why some things that the characters do in a show are good?
4. How often do you discuss with your child(ren) why some things that the characters do in a show are bad?
5. How often do you participate in or learn more about the games played by your child(ren)?
6. How often do you talk to your child(ren) about how to behave on social media?
7. How often do you explain to your child(ren) what they may say or do regarding online messages?
8. How often do you explain to your child(ren) how to protect their personal information online?
9. How often do you explain to your child(ren) how to deal with cyberbullying?
10. How often do you explain to your child(ren) how to handle online messages sent from an unknown source?
11. How often do you support or encourage your child(ren) about the positive things they can experience through the Internet?

***Restrictive Parental Mediation (RPM)* (Adapted from Valkenburg, 2009; Nikken & Jansz, 2014)**

1. Do you currently use any filtering/monitoring/blocking software (e.g. phone/computer parental control features) for your child (ren)?

Please indicate the number for each of the software you are using. Put “0” if you are currently not using a specific one.

- a. Filtering _____
 - b. Monitoring _____
 - c. Blocking _____
2. How often do you set rules with your child(ren) that certain content online is forbidden?
 - a. Shows: Never ----- Very Often
 - b. Films: Never ----- Very Often
 - c. Websites: Never ----- Very Often
 - d. Games: Never ----- Very Often
 - e. Music: Never ----- Very Often
 - f. Other content not listed: _____(please specify) : Never ----- Very Often
 - g. Other content not listed: _____(please specify) : Never ----- Very Often
 3. How often do you tell your child(ren) to turn off a certain program when you see that it may be inappropriate for them?
 4. How often do you tell your child(ren) to stop playing an online game when you see that it may be inappropriate for them?
 5. How often do you set a specific time of the day for your child(ren) to be on any online device (e.g., phone, iPad, computer, online-connected TV)?
 6. How often do you set a specific amount of time for your child(ren) to be on any online device (e.g., phone, iPad, computer, online-connected TV)?
 7. How often do you use an online device (phone, iPad, computer, online-connected TV) to keep your child(ren) occupied during a busy time of the day?

8. How often do you warn your child(ren) that online activities may be dangerous?
9. How often do you warn your child(ren) that online activities may be a waste of time?

Perceived Importance of Verbal Communication

Measured on a 5-point scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”

Following are a set of statements for which we want your opinion. There are no correct or incorrect answers to these statements. We just want to know what you think about these issues. Please read each item carefully and respond by telling us the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of them.

Frequency

1. I do not believe it is necessary to verbally communicate with my child(ren) about their Internet use.

(Item dropped due to low correlation)

2. I feel strongly that frequently discussing with my child(ren) about their online activities is important.
3. I think that frequently talking to my child(ren) about their Internet use is a reasonable thing to do.
4. I think that frequently emphasizing my expectations with my child(ren) verbally about when and how they use the Internet is a good idea.

Conversation and Conformity Communication Style

5. It is important for me to verbally communicate my expectations to my child(ren) on what they watch, download, and participate in on the Internet.
6. I believe it is necessary to deliver the rules verbally to my child(ren) regarding using the Internet.
7. I think it is a good idea to inform my child(ren) about my ways of monitoring their activities online through verbal communication.
8. It is reasonable to verbally explain the household rules regarding using the Internet to my child(ren).

9. It is important for me to encourage my child(ren) to talk to me regarding their Internet use.
10. I think it is crucial to ask my child(ren) questions about what types of activities they engage in on the Internet.
11. I think it is important to engage in deeper discussions with my child(ren) regarding their online activities.
12. I think it is important for me to encourage my child(ren) to share and ask questions about the Internet.

Openness and Honesty

13. I think it is important for me to create an environment where my child(ren) can feel free to ask questions about their online activities.
14. It is important for me to speak to my child(ren) in a supportive tone when they talk to me about their activities online.
15. It is important for me to talk to my child(ren) in a forgiving tone when I tell them that certain online activities are not acceptable.
16. It is reasonable for me to speak to my child(ren) in a considerate manner when I tell them that certain online activities are not permitted.
17. It is crucial for me to encourage my child(ren) to speak to me honestly about their online activities.
18. It is a good idea for me to encourage my child(ren) to talk to me openly about their online activities.

Demographics

Finally, we would like to know a few things about you.

1. What was your household's total annual income in the year 2017?

a. Less than \$10,000	d. \$30,000 to \$39,999
b. \$10,000 to \$19,999	e. \$40,000 to \$49,999
c. \$20,000 to \$29,999	f. \$50,000 to \$59,999

- g. \$60,000 to \$69,999
- h. \$70,000 to \$79,999
- i. \$80,000 to \$89,999
- j. \$90,000 to \$99,999
- k. \$100,000 to \$149,999
- l. \$150,000 to \$199,999
- m. \$200,000 to \$299,999
- n. \$300,000 to \$399,999
- o. \$400,000 to \$499,999
- p. \$500,000 or more

2. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, select the highest degree received.

- a. No schooling completed
- b. Nursery school to 8th grade
- c. Some high school, no diploma
- d. High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent
- e. Some college credit, no degree
- f. Trade/technical/vocational training
- g. Associate degree
- h. Bachelor's degree
- i. Master's degree
- j. Professional degree
- k. Doctorate degree

3. In which state do you currently reside?

a. _____

4. Please write the city and zip code you currently reside in.

a. City: _____

b. Zip Code: _____

5. Please state your current employment status below.

a. Employed full-time (more than 30 hours per week)

b. Employed part-time (less than 30 hours per week)

c. Full-time/part-time (students with a job should select this option)

d. Self-employed/Business owner/Freelancer

e. Not currently working

f. Retired

g. Prefer not to say

h. Other (specify): _____

6. Gender:

a. Male

b. Female

7. Age: _____

8. Ethnicity:

a. Asian

b. Black/African

- c. Caucasian
- d. Hispanic/ Latinx
- e. Native American
- f. Pacific Islander
- g. Other: _____